

VZCZCXYZ0000
PP RUEHWEB

DE RUEHMN #1061/01 3611502
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 271502Z DEC 07
FM AMEMBASSY MONTEVIDEO
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7848
INFO RUCNMER/MERCOSUR COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUCPDO/DEPT OF COMMERCE WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L MONTEVIDEO 001061

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

STATE FOR WHA/BSC
STATE PASS TO USTR

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/27/2017
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [ETRD](#) [UY](#)
SUBJECT: FRENTE AMPLIO: UNABLE TO ELECT A LEADER, BUT
UNITED AGAINST THE U.S.

Classified By: Charge d, Affaires a.i. Peter X. Harding for Reasons 1.4
(b) and (d)

SUMMARY

11. (SBU) Summary: The Frente Amplio (FA) failed to elect a new leader to head the coalition's political apparatus during its semi-annual congress December 13-16. Coalition leaders worked late into the night before and during the meetings, seeking consensus as to who would lead the FA, an important bellwether before the Frente later chooses who will be its candidate for president in 2009. None was reached. President Vazquez unsuccessfully proposed four potential candidates. The end result was that current FA President Jorge Brovetto will continue as caretaker in that post until the next FA congress in April. While unable to choose a leader, the FA did weigh in against an FTA with the U.S., upping the ante for Vazquez as he considers ways to open Uruguay's economy. END SUMMARY.

THE FRENTE POSTPONES CHOOSING ITS NEXT LEADER

12. (SBU) The FA held its semi-annual congress December 13-16. The task at hand was to select a new FA president -- something coalition leaders were unable to manage. Constanza Moreira, a political analyst backed by the FA's largest party, the Popular Participation Movement (MPP), could only garner 41% support, well short of the 66% consensus required by the coalition's statutes. The MPP, representing 30% of delegates, combined with the Vertiente Artiguista Party and others in support of Moreira. MPP leader and Minister of Agriculture Jose Mujica lamented his candidate's impending defeat during remarks to the congress, "you have massacred this independent comrade." In remarks to the press later, Mujica insisted that "life goes on," and accepted that consensus had not been reached. He recalled that current FA president Jorge Brovetto was elected by a small margin, and added, "The old Frente Amplio members among us are accustomed to such events." Moreira was the only candidate considered by the full congress.

13. (SBU) The Communist Party (PCU) played a key role in opposing Moreira and instead championed a change to the FA's charter to create a secretariat with a rotating presidency until consensus emerged. While the Frente did not seriously consider this change, media reports touted the Communist Party's success in stopping Moreira's candidacy while boosting the far left's influence ahead of an eventual FA leadership decision.

¶4. (SBU) Sources close to President Vazquez, who did not support the MPP's Moreira, seemed content that the decision was postponed. However, during the course of the congress, Vazquez floated four potential candidates to lead the FA, none of whom were finally considered by the congress. They included: Fabricio Siniscalchi, Brovotto's right hand man in the FA, Hector Lescano, the Minister of Tourism, Senator Alberto Curiel, and Eduardo Fernandez, the Secretary General of Vazquez' Socialist Party. The President's inability to bring any of his preferred candidates before the congress for a vote was considered proof by some observers that the president is out of step with the FA, or vice versa. NOTE: The question remains whether Vazquez will succeed in bringing the FA around to his positions as he has so many times in the past. END NOTE.

FRENTE UNITED AGAINST FREE TRADE

¶5. (SBU) While the question of leadership vexed the Frente, its governing body was united in rejecting the prospect of a Free Trade Agreement with the U.S. The FA congress also urged the GOU to carefully consider the details of the Trade and Investment Framework (TIFA) currently being negotiated. The congress called for special attention to the TIFA chapters on intellectual property rights, government purchases, and public services, warning that "if these (chapters) were not compatible with national interests they would be not be accepted by the political establishment."

COMMENT

¶6. (C) COMMENT: The FA congress' preemptive rejection of an FTA with the U.S. ups the ante for Vazquez, should he seek to actively pursue such an agreement. However, Vazquez still enjoys higher approval ratings than his party and has shown in the past his ability to bring the FA on board to achieve his objectives. General public opinion is also in favor of increased trade ties.

¶7. (C) COMMENT CONTINUED: The Frente Amplio will likely face continued difficulty in selecting its coalition president, a challenge that we expect will be magnified even further as it sets about choosing a candidate for the 2009 presidential elections. The lack of an obvious political heir to President Vazquez, the backdrop of recent allegations of corruption within the FA, and the far left's dissatisfaction with a government it views as too centrist, will combine to make an interesting political cocktail in the months to come. The FA's public image is languishing. A December 10 poll by Factum showed the FA with its lowest approval rating since early 2002 - 44%(compared to 57% in March 2007) - while Vazquez' approval ratings rose back to 52%. However, despite the FA's internal strife, opposition parties are even less cohesive and the Frente remains the current odds-on favorite to maintain the presidency in 2009. Finally, there are strong rumors that Vazquez will shuffle his cabinet next February -- ministers who might be replaced are Azucena Berutti (defense), Mariano Arana (housing, and Reinaldo Gargani (foreign affairs). If true, the new ministers should reveal clues on the future direction of the GOU and the extent to which the FA influences it.
Harding